Novice special and general education teachers face a number of common challenges as they enter the classroom. Both groups are responsible for acquiring curricular knowledge; planning and providing instruction; motivating students and managing their behavior; interacting with parents, colleagues, and administrators; and carrying out non-instructional duties. But beginning special educators have additional obligations that differ either in degree or kind from those of their counterparts in general education. In particular, they must also modify curriculum for students with widely varying needs and disabilities, devise Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), employ assistive technology, and comply with federal special education laws. Further, in their first years of teaching, early career special education teachers often receive little guidance from administrators or from district policies with regard to the curriculum or instructional strategies they are expected to use. Given these challenges, it is not surprising that researchers have found high levels of migration and attrition among new special educators. In an analysis of data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) found that first-year special education teachers were two-and-a-half times more likely than general education teachers to leave their positions or to leave the profession, a finding echoed by Boe (2006).

Several recent studies have investigated factors associated with high levels of special educator migration and attrition. These factors include ambiguous roles, isolation from other teachers, excessive paperwork and procedural demands, difficulty meeting the needs of diverse students, and high levels of stress (Billingsley, 2004; Gersten et al., 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). At the same time, in the past two decades a number of districts and schools have begun offering mentoring and induction programs for novice special education teachers. While research on such programs has been limited, some studies have found that informal support from mentors and colleagues is associated with increased commitment and retention among beginning special educators (Whitaker, 2000; Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Further, there is some evidence that having a mentor who teaches special education can provide new special educators with distinct types of instructional skills, content knowledge, and knowledge of students, along with psychological support (Lane & Canosa, 1995; Whitaker, 2000).

Despite these advances in scholarship on the experiences of new special educators and how mentoring and induction programs seem to influence them, there has been little research on how novices make sense of the curricular, instructional, and role expectations placed on them. Further, there is little understanding in the research literature of how beginning special educators negotiate relationships with and make use of supports from mentors, colleagues, and administrators. This paper builds on earlier research by investigating the induction experiences of four beginning special education teachers and four beginning general education teachers in one school district in Michigan. Based on interviews with the study participants in 2006-07, we examine the expectations faced by both groups of teachers regarding curriculum, instruction, roles in their schools, and other professional responsibilities. In addition, the paper considers how formal mentors, special education and general education colleagues, and principals affected new teachers’ efforts to determine, negotiate, and meet the expectations placed on them.

The purpose of the paper is twofold. First, we explicate differences in the curricular, instructional, and role expectations experienced by beginning special and general education teachers. In this part of the paper, we provide evidence that the effort exerted by novice special educators in meeting the expectations placed on them seems to differ in degree and kind from that exerted by new general educators. Second, the paper documents variations in how novices from both groups addressed expectations they encountered. That is, we provide evidence that the instructional decisions and resources associated with positive induction experiences for the new special educators in this study seemed to differ from those associated with comparable experiences for the novice general educators. Based on these results, we argue that principals and school districts need to conceptualize and structure induction support
for special education teachers differently from the way that it is typically organized for new general education teachers.

The first section of this paper reviews research on the induction, commitment, and retention of beginning special and general education teachers. In the second section, we describe the theoretical framework that shaped the data collection and analysis for this study. The components of the research design – sample, data collection methods, and modes of analysis – are featured in the third section. The fourth section presents results regarding the varying expectations placed on novice special and general education teachers while the fifth section includes findings on how these groups differed in the ways they negotiated relationships with mentors and colleagues and accessed support. In the sixth section, we discuss the implications of these findings for efforts by researchers, policy makers, and administrators to structure induction programs and experiences for new special educators. We conclude by explaining how this study builds on earlier research and by considering some of its limitations.

Research on Curricular Expectations, Induction Support, and Outcomes for New Special Education and General Education Teachers

Most research on beginning teachers has focused either on special education or general education teachers; few studies have included both groups of educators. Thus, it is important to note that in this literature review, we have made comparisons between and drawn conclusions about differences in curricular expectations, induction experiences, and outcomes for both groups of teachers. In other words, since few prior studies have made such comparisons, we have done so here in this review of the relevant research.

Research suggests that the curricular and instructional expectations placed on beginning special education teachers are often more ambiguous than those placed on novice general educators and that they are often defined in multiple, conflicting ways (Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Conderman & Stephens, 2000; Mastropieri, 2001; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). With regard to curriculum, special education teachers are often responsible for teaching multiple subjects across multiple grade levels, yet most do so without adequate resources for determining how this instruction should look (Kilgore et al., 2003). While general education teachers are typically provided with materials such as textbooks, pacing guides, and state teaching standards, special education teachers often do not receive the same kind of direction. Further, although students with special needs participate in state assessments and are expected to learn similar material as general education students, the degree to which administrators expect special education teachers to align their instruction with the general education curriculum varies, and little guidance is given on how to adapt materials to meet students’ needs. This burden can be made worse when there are a limited number of models in a given school of how instruction of children with disabilities should look.

In contrast, curricular and instructional expectations for new general education teachers are often clearer and more precise than those placed on novice special educators. In a study in New York City’s District 2, for example, Stein & D’Amico (2002) reported that district policies related to curriculum, assessment, and teacher evaluation provided clear messages and strongly shaped the expectations that were placed on new general education elementary teachers. Similarly, in Washington state, Grossman and Thompson (2004) found that in addition to state student standards and assessments, districts communicated expectations to novice secondary language arts teachers through “(t)he tasks they assign(ed) to new teachers, the resources they provide(d), the learning environments they create(d), the assessments they design(ed), and the conversations they provoke(d) (2004, p.298).” Further, in a third study, Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman (2004) reported that district policy in two California districts sent precise messages to early career elementary teachers regarding literacy instruction and had salient consequences for their learning opportunities and access to resources.

Research also indicates that the work lives of special educators are often viewed as distinct from general education and the organization of schools can heighten feelings of isolation (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). When a school is not committed to the inclusion of children with disabilities, opportunities to collaborate with general education teachers can be limited and such students will often be considered
the responsibility of special educators. (Kilgore et al., 2003). In addition, with teachers often grouped by teams or grade levels, there can be much physical distance between special education and general education teachers, limiting opportunities for interaction. Even when new special educators are located near general education colleagues and/or have regular times to meet with them, procedural demands and paperwork can limit them from working with colleagues on instructional issues. In particular, along with their teaching responsibilities, special education teachers must complete IEPs, initial and follow up evaluations of students, and behavioral assessments. Further, paperwork has been cited in several studies as a major reason for leaving the classroom (Billingsley, 2004). For example, in a study featuring a nationally representative sample of special education teachers with less than five years of experience, Billingsley, Carlson, and Klein (2004) reported that 72 percent indicated that routine duties and paperwork interfered with their teaching.

With regard to mentoring and induction, research suggests that when relationships with mentors are informal and more personal, new special educators are more likely to intend to stay in teaching (Whitaker, 2000). The same finding applies with regard to informal support from other colleagues (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). In addition, it seems that for beginning special educators, mentors in special education can offer unique pedagogical and assessment skills, knowledge of students, and knowledge of subject matter that general education teachers cannot (Lane & Canosa, 1995; White, 1996). Further, such mentors are well positioned to provide emotional support to early career special educators (Whitaker, 2000; Kueker & Haensly, 1991). If the mentor is in special education, he or she is likely to be one of the few individuals in the beginning teacher’s school who has gone through a similar work experience as the novice special educator. At the same time, many new special education teachers are not assigned to mentors who teach special education in their schools. Further, even when a beginning special educator is matched with a mentor at their school who teaches special education, the mentor may have a different job description (i.e., they may be responsible for working with disabilities that differ from those to which the novice is assigned) and, thus, may not be familiar with the novice’s curriculum or caseload.

When new special education teachers remain isolated from colleagues and have little access to professional resources, they are likely to struggle to meet the needs of their diverse students and to experience high levels of stress. In addition, evidence indicates that isolation among novice special educators can have negative consequences for their intent to remaining teaching, as well as their actual retention decisions (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Billingsley & Tomchin, 1992; Crane & Iwanicki, 1991; Mastropieri, 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999). In Billingsley, Carlson, and Klein’s (2004) study, for example, teachers who reported that they did not feel included in their schools or felt that their principal did not understand what they did were most susceptible to feeling dissatisfied with their job. Lack of administrative support was also cited as a strong determinant of stress for first year teachers by Billingsley and Tomchin (1992) and Kilgore and Griffin (1998). At the same time, when support from colleagues and administrators was present, teachers were more committed to staying in teaching (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004).

Research on mentoring and induction in general education has produced comparable findings. For example, Author (2007a) reported that when mentors were knowledgeable about novice teachers’ curricula and state assessments, they were more likely to help them plan instruction and analyze student learning. In a second study, Kardos et al. (2001) found that new teachers were well served in schools where veterans supported novices through mentoring, collaborative work in grade teams and departments, and professional development. In both studies, principals played a key role in successful induction experiences by addressing issues related to instruction, collaboration, and student learning (Kardos et al., 2001; Author, 2007b). In research on retention, Smith and Ingersoll (2004) used the 1999-2000 SASS to investigate the influence of induction activities on first-year teacher attrition and migration while controlling for other factors. They reported that having a mentor in one’s field reduced the risk of leaving teaching by about 30 percent, but had little effect on teacher migration. In addition, collaborating regularly with colleagues on instruction reduced the risk of leaving teaching by 43 percent and lowered the risk of migration by 25 percent (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Further, recent research by Glazerman and
colleagues (under review) found that high-intensity induction programs were associated with higher levels of retention among early career teachers.

In sum, research indicates that compared to their counterparts in general education, new special education teachers experience higher levels of role ambiguity and higher degrees of isolation from colleagues. At the same time, studies have found that mentoring and induction programs can provide opportunities for novice special education (and general education) teachers to collaborate with colleagues and acquire instructional skills, curricular knowledge, and knowledge of students. But it is unclear from existing research how beginning special educators make sense of the curricular, instructional, and role expectations placed on them or how they negotiate key relationships with mentors, special and general education colleagues, administrators, and other individuals in their schools and districts. The purpose of this paper is to explicate differences in the expectations placed on new special education and general education teachers in one school district as well as variations in how novices from both groups understood and responded to the expectations they experienced.

Theorizing How Teachers’ Social Networks Shape Their Efforts to Define and Carry Out Their Roles

In this study, we drew on sensemaking theory and social capital theory to help us investigate how new special education and general education teachers negotiated the curricular, instructional, and role expectations they faced as well as their relationships with formal mentors, colleagues, administrators, and other key personnel. According to sensemaking theory, action is based on how individuals observe or choose to focus on information in their environments, construct understandings of that information, and then act based on those understandings (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995). Since the meaning of information – in this case, messages about curricular, instructional, and role expectations – is not always clear, beginning teachers often must develop their own interpretations of the expectations placed on them. But this occurs by placing new information into pre-existing cognitive frameworks (Weick, 1995). Novice teachers, then, focus on messages in their environments and construct understandings of them based on their prior beliefs and practices (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2000; Wilson, 1990).

New teachers’ efforts to make sense of the expectations they face are social in two primary ways (Coburn, 2001). First, through social interactions and negotiations, they construct understandings of their roles. For novice special educators, for example, through interactions with administrators, special education colleagues, and general education colleagues, they learn which students they are expected to teach, whether and how they are to modify the general education curriculum for their students, the amount of time they are to work in general educators’ classrooms as well as their own classrooms, and how they are to handle student assessment. But sensemaking is also social in that it reflects teachers’ prior professional experiences and broader sets of relationships. For example, beliefs in the special education profession about inclusion of students with special needs, the use of diagnostic assessments, and appropriate writing instruction for students with learning disabilities can shape how beginning special educators make sense of and carry out their roles in particular schools.

In sum, sensemaking theory suggests that beginning teachers will construct understandings of their roles based on interactions with mentors, colleagues, principals, and others in their environments, as well as their prior experiences and professional norms. But the access that novice teachers have to colleagues, administrators, and other key personnel depends on a variety of factors, ranging from their teaching assignment to the location of their classroom in the school. Further, the extent to which these individuals place expectations on new teachers can vary significantly. Therefore, we also drew on social capital theory to explore how beginning teachers’ social networks were structured and where they were located within their networks.

Bourdieu defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (1985, p. 248). Thus, social capital theory emphasizes the numerous ways that individuals gain access to resources in their networks of social relations and seeks to explicate how the nature and quality of these relations affect important outcomes (Coburn & Russell, 2008;
Pogodzinski, under review). With regard to beginning teachers, it highlights the resources that are available to novices through social relations and suggests that different types of relations will – to varying degrees – facilitate access to resources, professional growth, and commitment to teaching (Coleman, 1988).

Social capital theory is a potentially useful tool in explaining why special educators often find their jobs overwhelming, are unsure of their roles, and feel professionally isolated. Inequalities in the ways that teachers are able to access resources may largely be due to the structures of their social networks as well as teachers’ positions within such structures (Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004). For example, a new 3rd-grade teacher may have frequent access to other 3rd-grade teachers as well as 2nd- and 4th-grade teachers in their school. In contrast, a beginning special education teacher in the same school may not have access to other special educators and her access to general education colleagues may be limited to those students who are assigned to her. Given the high levels of uncertainty faced by novice teachers, they stand to benefit most from access to resources, but they often struggle to gather information on their own. That is, paradoxically, a new teacher is often handicapped in her ability to draw from multiple resources because she has not yet developed strong relationships with her colleagues. Her location within a given network, and the relatively few colleagues accessible to her, can have a significant influence on her ability to access the network’s resources.

At the same time, several key individuals and factors in novices’ environments can help them a) make sense of the expectations placed on them by others; b) adjudicate among their own beliefs, others’ expectations, and professional norms; c) negotiate relationships with others and access resources from them. Principals, for one, can play central roles in helping beginning teachers’ to define their roles and make sense of the expectations they encounter (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Coburn, 2001; Kardos et al., 2001; Author, 2007b). Further, for both new special education and new general education teachers, access to mentors or experienced colleagues who have the same teaching assignment and/or knowledge of their curriculum can facilitate novices’ professional growth and efforts to build relationships with others (Lane & Canosa, 1995; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; White, 1996; Author, 2007a).

While both groups of educators must rely on others in their schools for help determining their roles and for feedback on their practices, novice special education teachers are particularly dependent on experienced general education teachers and, thus, potentially quite vulnerable. But principals, mentors, and experienced colleagues with knowledge of new teachers’ curriculum and instructional responsibilities can be critically important in helping them to make sense of their positions and to negotiate relationships with others. Thus, the theoretical framework underlying this study posits that differences in special education and general education teachers’ social networks (i.e., their relationships with principals, mentors, and key colleagues) are related to variations in their access to colleagues and resources and in how they construct understandings of and carry out their roles.

Methods

District Sample. This study is part of a larger, mixed-methods study of beginning teachers’ induction experiences in 10 Michigan and Indiana school districts.iii (The larger study is known as the Michigan Indiana Early Career Teacher (MIECT) study.) For the study described in this paper, we employed qualitative methods to conduct research on early career special education and general education teachers in one school district in Michigan during the 2006-07 school year. In selecting a district for this analysis, we sought one that served high percentages of low-income and racial minority students and that had hired 25 or more teachers in 2005-06 and 2006-07. The district that we chose for this study, Kalineiv, served 9,448 students in grades K-12 in 2006-07. Of these students, 40 percent were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and 50 percent were racial minorities.

In August 2005 and August 2006, Kaline provided a two-day orientation before the school year started for teachers who were new to the district. The orientation addressed such topics as language arts and mathematics content standards, classroom management strategies, technology, and the role of the Kaline Teachers’ Association. In addition, each first- and second-year teacher was assigned to an
experienced teacher who served as their formal mentor. Further, Kaline provided regular workshops through the year for teachers who were new to the district. These workshops took place on weekdays after the school day was over and they addressed such topics as classroom management, student motivation, parent-teacher relationships, and student testing. Finally, new general education teachers in Kaline in 2006-07 took part in professional development related to Everyday Mathematics (elementary) and Connected Mathematics 2 (middle school).

Teacher Sample. In selecting first- and second-year teachers from Kaline to participate in the study, we focused on elementary and middle school special and general education teachers. With regard to the special educators, we invited teachers who were responsible for providing academic instruction to students in grades 1-8, but excluded those who did not provide instruction (e.g., school psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers). In terms of the general education teachers, we only invited those in core content areas in grades 1-8: elementary (grades 1-5), language arts, history/social studies, mathematics, and science. All first- and second-year teachers in Kaline in 2006-07 were invited to participate, but they had to a) be teaching full-time, b) have earned a standard teaching certificate, and c) have completed university-based teacher preparation. In addition, the student demographics in the study participants’ classrooms and schools had to be consistent with those throughout their district. That is, we wanted to ensure that a given novice’s experiences were not significantly shaped by having much higher or lower percentages of low-income students than other teachers in the study. In sum, the criteria for selecting new teacher participants included a) being responsible for academic instruction/teaching in a core content area, b) teaching full-time, c) having earned a standard teaching certificate, and d) having demographics in their classrooms and schools that were consistent with those throughout Kaline.

In Kaline, there were 10 special education teachers and 20 general education teachers in 2006-07 who met the selection criteria. Of these, 7 special education teachers and 16 general education teachers completed surveys for the larger MIECT study in fall 2006. Of the teachers who completed surveys, all 7 special educators and all 16 general education teachers were invited to take part in the interview study (described in this paper); of those invited, four special education and eight general education teachers volunteered to participate. We included all of the special education teachers and four of the eight general education teachers who volunteered to participate in the study described in this paper; in other words 40 percent (4/10) of the special education teachers who met the selection criteria were interviewed and 25 percent (4/16) of the general education teachers who met the selection criteria were interviewed. In sum, two elementary school special education teachers, two middle school special education teachers, two elementary school general education teachers, and two middle school general education teachers participated in the study. Further, teachers from four elementary schools and two middle schools (of a total of 11 elementary schools and three middle schools in the district) participated in the study. (See Table 1 in the Appendix for information about the study participants and the schools in which they worked in 2006-07.)

Data Collection. Data collection during the 2006-07 school year involved interviewing beginning special education and general education teachers twice each (winter 2007 and spring 2007). In the interviews, we probed to learn about the study participants’ professional backgrounds, teaching assignments, and the curricular, instructional, and role expectations they experienced in their schools. In addition, the teachers were asked about the content and frequency of their interactions with their formally assigned mentors, colleagues, and school and district administrators, and their participation in induction and professional development activities. In particular, both groups of participants were asked about their interactions with both special education and general education teachers. We also probed to learn about the study participants’ experiences with the formal teacher evaluation process in their schools and district as well as their perceptions of how state and district accountability policies influenced their work. (The interview protocols used with the special education teachers and the elementary general education teachers are included in the Appendix. The protocols for the middle school general education teachers were identical to that used with the elementary general education teachers except that they each focused on just one content area (e.g., mathematics, science).)
Modes of Analysis. For each round of qualitative data collection (winter 2007 and spring 2007), a detailed analytic memo was written immediately following each audiotaped interview that described the tone and meaning discerned at the time of the interview. In addition, each interview was transcribed verbatim. NVivo software were used to analyze data from the interviews in order to generate initial codes (see Table 2 in the Appendix for our lists of initial and final codes for the special education and general education teachers.) By grouping together categories and using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we moved to higher levels of abstraction and eventually derived the following codes: new teacher background and assignment; curricular, instructional, and role expectations; content and frequency of interactions with mentors, special education colleagues, and general education colleagues; content and frequency of interactions with principals; content of and frequency of participation in professional development activities; and teacher evaluation activities (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For the second stage of qualitative data analysis, we compiled case reports by teaching assignment (i.e., special education and general education) and identified emergent themes regarding a) curricular, instructional, and role expectations; b) interactions with mentors and colleagues; and c) interactions with administrators. We then used these themes to explore possible connections between a) and b), and between b) and c). This technique is recommended by Achinstein et al. (2004) as a way to reveal a number of relationships pertaining to beginning teachers, including ones between a) mentoring and new teachers’ instructional practices and b) interactions with colleagues and new teachers’ instructional practices. At the same time, several linkages between additional factors and outcomes were evident as well including ones between new teachers’ successful negotiation of the expectations placed on them and a) access to colleagues who could communicate expertise and b) access to administrators who helped them to define their role to general education teachers.

In ascertaining and describing the processes involved in meeting curricular, instructional, and role expectations, teaching position was the key analytical unit (i.e., special education or general education). Thus, data analysis first involved looking across the expectations placed on all four special education teachers; this was then repeated with the four general education teachers. In developing an account of how the study participants negotiated their professional relationships, though, we grouped them by schooling level (i.e., elementary and middle school). This enabled us to analyze the varying roles that principals played for special and general education teachers at both schooling levels and, in particular, to better understand the key role school leaders played for beginning special education teachers at the elementary level.

Exerting Effort In Response to Varying Curricular and Role Expectations

The study found considerable differences in the curricular expectations placed on beginning special education and general education teachers, the students whom they were assigned, and the classrooms and physical settings in which they were expected to work. Further, the study also found differences in the nature and amount of effort the two groups seemed to exert in attempting to meet the expectations placed on them. All four novice special educators were required to create their own curricula or to make substantive changes in the general education curricula while the curricula in general education were more structured and clearly defined. The four special education teachers varied in the percentage of time they spent teaching in resource rooms as compared to co-teaching or assisting in general education classrooms. But all four served students with a wide variety of learning needs and disabilities and were frequently asked to provide assistance to students who were not formally part of their caseloads. In contrast, the four early career general education teachers primarily taught two to three subjects in the same classroom. This section explicates differences in the curricular expectations faced by these two groups of teachers, their assignments, and the physical settings in which they worked, as well as differences in the effort exerted by the two groups in response to these expectations.

Curricular Expectations. All four beginning special education teachers in Kaline were asked to develop their own curricula in language arts and/or mathematics or to make substantive changes in the
district’s general education curricula. In contrast to the novice general educators, they devoted substantially more time and effort to creating or modifying curricula. For example, Kelly Potter was a first-year special education teacher at DeGrosta Elementary School in 2006-07 where she worked with 13 2nd- through 5th-graders. She primarily taught language arts with a focus on reading skills and comprehension, but there was no clear curriculum when she started in August 2006. In her words, “I viewed it as very negative. Everyone tells me to just find something, but it was very difficult as a first-year teacher to figure out what the best resources were to use. And I didn’t really know any of the other resource teachers in the district.” Eventually, Potter adopted the Reading A to Z program, which addressed phonics and comprehension, and she supplemented it with running records and fluency tests. In addition, she employed Scholastic guided reading lessons that featured short picture books and helped students practice vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. But it took her several weeks to understand what was expected of her and to create her own curriculum.

Similarly, Ann Williams, a third-year special education teacher at Bentley Elementary, taught language arts and math to students in grades one through five in 2006-07. For language arts, she focused on reading, spelling, phonics, and comprehension, but her math and writing curricula were less clearly articulated. According to Williams, “It’s tricky because I don’t have a math curriculum . . . it’s not given to me. I have to make my own stuff up, borrow from the general ed teachers the stuff they have. Sometimes they will send me stuff they want me to do.” In the absence of a formal curriculum in math, she relied on state and district student content standards, the district report card, and the students’ IEPs to formulate her math curriculum. Williams added, “I would like a little direction from the district to know what I have to teach and how I have to teach. I know what to teach for writing, but do I know what ways, what order, what scope?”

At the middle school level, the two special education study participants both taught math and language arts to students with special needs in their resource rooms and they both also co-taught and assisted general education teachers in two to three subjects. Barry Higginson, a first-year 7th-grade resource room teacher at Cherry Middle School, had 19 students in his caseload. In fall 2006 and winter 2007, Higginson had attended professional development in Connected Mathematics, the district’s middle school math curriculum. In his words, “The problem is, when you go into special ed, this is a gen ed curriculum. It’s not geared for special ed. The special ed book is very small.” The fourth special education teacher in the study was Kent Fuller, a second-year 8th-grade resource room teacher at Vista Middle School in 2006-07. Fuller agreed that “(t)he curriculum is the same in general ed and special ed; it’s just pared down.” While he felt that some of the math topics were unrealistic for his students, he tried to follow the curriculum with his students as much as possible.

In contrast, the curricular expectations for the beginning general education teachers were much clearer and, as a result, they devoted much less time and effort to creating or modifying curricula. Maria Helton was a second-year 5th-grade teacher at Edwards Elementary School in 2006-07. She taught language arts, math, and social studies to a class of 20 students and she also taught social studies to the other 5th-grade classes. Like other K-5 elementary teachers in Kaline, she was required to use the Four Blocks approach for language arts: Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing, and Working with Words (which was similar to spelling). While the lessons for Working with Words were prescribed, Helton had more autonomy to determine the curriculum for reading and writing, as long as she followed the basic structure of the curriculum on a weekly basis. In terms of math, the district required all K-5 teachers to use Everyday Mathematics for the math curriculum. This curriculum involved scripted lessons that featured extensive work with math manipulatives and math problem solving. In Helton’s words, in language arts, “(w)e aren’t given a curriculum and said this is what you teach word for word. They don’t give us that. Math, yes; language arts, no.” For both the Four Blocks and Everyday Mathematics, Helton attended professional development sessions to learn about the curricula and worked with district curriculum specialists to implement them in her classroom.

Another study participant, Elise Volcker, was a first-year, 3rd-grade teacher in 2006-07 at Barnaby Elementary School. Like Helton, she also taught Four Blocks for language arts and had attended professional development sessions on the Four Blocks. After participating in such sessions, her principal
“encourages me to go in to see other colleagues and watch them use it in the classroom. And I get together with my colleagues and we talk about it.” Similarly, she taught Everyday Mathematics, which she referred to as the required district curriculum. According to Volcker, “(i)t’s a lot of hands on, working with manipulatives, having them generate ideas of how to solve a problem and not me telling them, this is how they should solve the problem.” She had participated in professional development related to Everyday Mathematics and spoke frequently with the other 3rd-grade teachers at Barnaby Elementary about the math curriculum.

At the middle school level, Paul Grantham was a first-year 6th-grade math teacher in 2006-07 at Cherry Middle School. Similar to Everyday Mathematics, the district’s middle school curriculum, Connected Mathematics 2, was prescriptive and problem-based. Grantham described it as “very investigative, lots of group work, students discovering formulas, lots of word problems.” He learned about the curriculum by participating in district-sponsored professional development and by meeting regularly with his mentor, a 7th-grade math teacher whose classroom was located in the same part of the school. The fourth general education teacher in the study was Christie Denham, a first-year 6th-grade science teacher at Vista Middle School in 2006-07. During that year, the 6th-grade science curriculum across the district addressed topics from earth, physical, and life science. Denham had worked as a substitute 6th-grade science teacher at Vista for three months the previous year and was very familiar with the curriculum she was expected to teach.

Role Expectations. Along with these differences in curricular expectations, the special education teachers faced much greater ambiguity than their general education counterparts in terms of the students whom they were expected to teach and the physical settings in which they were expected to work. These work conditions often led them to exert significant amounts of effort in co-teaching classes and developing relationships with general education colleagues. For example, the 13 students on Potter’s caseload had a wide range of needs (many had speech and language impairments while one had Asperger’s Syndrome), and their needs required her to provide instruction both in her own resource classroom and in general education teachers’ classrooms. On average, she spent time in these students’ general education classrooms two to three times a week. But in addition to working with her caseload students, she also provided assistance to other students in general education classrooms. In her words, “my schedule is not the same every single day. I have a set schedule for every day, but it’s not consistent. I don’t have the third graders every day at 11.” She added that she found it “very hard to go into eight different teachers’ rooms.”

Like Potter, Williams taught students with a variety of disabilities including students with learning disabilities, autism, emotional impairments, and cognitive impairments. According to Williams, “(i)t’s interesting trying to involve a program for my learning disabilities kid and then mixing in the autistic students. There are two totally different ways that you need to teach.” Williams also served on her school’s child study team, which addressed the needs of students with academic or behavioral difficulties. As part of her role on the team, she conducted structured observations of students and, when necessary, helped conduct formal evaluations of them.

At the middle school level, both special education teachers were responsible for providing instruction to caseloads of students with special needs and both were expected to collaborate with general education teachers. Higginson taught two periods of language arts and one of math to his 19 caseload students in his resource room, and he provided support to general education teachers in math, science, and social studies. Most of the students on his caseload had learning disabilities while some had cognitive or emotional impairments. When they were receiving language arts or math instruction in his resource room, Higginson’s 19 students were typically divided across two to three general education classrooms at a time, and he was expected to provide support to all of these classes daily. For example, the 19 students “get farmed out among social studies, science, math first hour. Second hour is my math class, second grade resource math . . . After that, it’s another hour of pushing time, where they are everywhere again. It’s a lot of running around.”

Similarly, Fuller taught two periods of language arts and one period of math in his resource room to students on his caseload, most of whom had learning disabilities. In addition, he co-taught math and
history in general education classes, although these two co-teaching arrangements differed greatly from one another. The math teacher and Fuller planned units, lessons, and tests together and adapted them for his students with special needs. On the other hand, the history teacher planned her units and lessons herself and then shared them with Fuller. Also, while co-teaching with others forced Fuller to plan ahead and be prepared for his classes, “it (was) difficult because you have less time to do what you want to do, because of the roving” from class to class.

In contrast to their special education counterparts, there was more clarity for the general education teachers regarding where they worked and the students they taught. While the beginning special education teachers in this study taught resource room classes and frequently co-taught or assisted in general education classrooms, the novice general education teachers all taught three or four classes in a single classroom. For example, in 2006-07, Volcker taught language arts, math, social studies, and science all to the same group of 21 3rd-graders. Similarly, Helton taught language arts, math, and social studies to the same group of 20 5th graders, and she also taught two additional sections of social studies to the other two 5th grade classes. In exchange, her group of 20 students took science and health with each of the other two 5th-grade teachers.

At the middle school level, Grantham taught four classes of 6th-grade mathematics and one of 7th-grade math in 2006-07; this amounted to about 95 6th-graders and 25 7th-graders. For both grades, he employed the Connected Mathematics 2 curriculum. For her part, Denham taught four classes of 6th-grade science and one health class, and her science classes all followed the same earth, physical, and life science curriculum. For both of these early career teachers, the nature of their teaching assignments meant that they taught the same curriculum to several groups of students. This enabled them to become very familiar with their respective curricula, to learn the curricular topics/areas that were likely to be particularly challenging for students, and to develop strategies for modifying the curricula to meet students’ needs.

In sum, as compared to their general education counterparts, the novice special educators in this study seemed to exert much more time and effort in meeting the curricular and role expectations that were placed on them. In contrast, the general education teachers typically needed to learn the same amount of or less curricular material than the special educators and they usually taught this material to students with a narrower range of ability levels.

How Elementary Teachers Negotiated Relationships With Mentors, Colleagues, and Principals

It is clear that the curricular and role expectations for the four novice special educators seemed to differ from those faced by the four general education teachers in this study. But how did these two groups of teachers establish their roles in their schools and make sense of and respond to the expectations that were placed on them? What roles did mentors, colleagues, and principals play in this process? And how did each group of new teachers negotiate professional relationships with these individuals? In this study, we found that beginning special education teachers seemed to go through much different induction experiences than their general education counterparts as they determined their roles and addressed the expectations placed on them. In particular, due to the nature of the curricular and role expectations they faced, early career special educators were much more dependent on their general education colleagues (as compared to the novice general educators in the study) and they were expected to develop relationships with a greater number and wider range of individuals.

The elementary special educators were also less likely to receive school-based support from mentors or colleagues who taught the same curriculum that they taught or who worked with students with the same disabilities. In addition, principals were crucial in helping the special education elementary teachers to establish their roles and meet their responsibilities. In contrast, the general education teachers and middle school special educators were more likely to have access to school-based mentors who were knowledgeable about their curriculum and responsibilities. Further, the general educators and the middle school special educators seemed less dependent on their principals than the elementary special educators. In this section, we report findings on the beginning special and general education student participants who
taught at the elementary level while the next section reports findings on novice special and general education teachers in the study who taught at the middle school level.

As a first-year teacher in 2006-07, Kelly Potter faced major challenges because her beliefs about grouping and teaching students with special needs differed significantly from those of her general education colleagues. She believed it was important to group students with special needs by ability and to provide instruction to them in their general education classrooms as well as in her resource room. At the same time, there were “some teachers who disagree(d). They (didn’t) think it’s my responsibility to be in their classroom helping them out. They would much rather see me take the kid out of their classroom and work with them in mine.” Potter also felt isolated to some degree because the other special education teacher at DeGrosta Elementary worked with a different group of students, those who were cognitively impaired. In addition, Potter’s assigned mentor worked at a different school. While Potter and her mentor had similar teaching assignments and shared the same beliefs about the importance of developing relationships with students, Potter had little contact with her during her first year of teaching because they worked in different schools.

For Potter, her principal was centrally involved in helping her define her role and establish and maintain productive relationships with her general education colleagues. In particular, her principal supported her decision to group students by ability and to provide instruction both in her resource room and in the general education classes. In addition, her principal sent out “a school-wide e-mail talking about NCLB and why it’s important that students with disabilities are in the classroom. She (told) them to put me to work when I’m in there. She’s been very helpful with that.” Potter also received assistance and materials from the social worker at DeGrosta, an early childhood teacher who had previously worked as a resource room teacher, and a para-professional at the school. For her part, the social worker helped her write Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) and talked with her about individual cases. According to Potter, “Really, nobody has a special ed. program whereas the social worker is very willing to help out. We’re on the Child Study Team together and she has a ton of experience with IEPs.”

The other elementary special education teacher in the study, Ann Williams, was in a similar position as Potter. Her assigned mentor was only at her school two to three hours per week because she served as a teacher consultant to five schools and had her own caseload of students. While Williams had a comfortable relationship with her mentor and found her knowledgeable, she had little direct access to her because of the limited time she was at Bentley Elementary. Instead, she exchanged e-mails with her mentor when she had questions about her curriculum or placing students. In addition, Williams shared materials and discussed curricular issues and students with another special education teacher at her school, who was also early in her career. Further, she relied on the social worker at her school when she had questions about her curriculum or placing students. In addition, Williams shared materials and discussed curricular issues and students with another special education teacher at her school, who was also early in her career. Further, she relied on the social worker at her school when she had questions about students, IEPs, and her other day-to-day responsibilities. But in terms of establishing Williams’ role in the school, her principal helped her set up her teaching schedule so that it was fully aligned with those of the general education teachers. In her words, “my principal has it where everything I teach, the general ed. teachers are teaching the same things at the same time.” Williams added, “She is very good at coordinating and (ensuring) that there is communication between me and the general ed. teachers. There is a lot of communication that goes on that she fosters.”

In contrast to Potter and Williams, the two elementary general education teachers in the study had greater access to school-based mentors who were knowledgeable about their curriculum and they were less dependent on their general education colleagues in defining and carrying out their roles. Further, while their principals played important roles in supporting their professional growth, they were less dependent on them in building relationships with colleagues or meeting their responsibilities. As a first-year teacher in 2006-07, for example, Elise Volcker was assigned to a mentor at Barnaby Elementary who also taught 3rd grade. In Volcker’s words, “I talk to her every day because she is in third grade. A third grade teacher.” For the most part, their conversations centered around the language arts and mathematics curricula. Volcker described her relationship with her mentor as being “very helpful” and mentioned even being able to talk with her for an hour on a Sunday about a school-related issue. She also mentioned talking with her mentor and the other 3rd-grade teacher at Barnaby about classroom management and discipline.
In terms of her principal, Volcker reported that he encouraged her to observe other teachers at Barnaby and secured resources for her to attend additional professional development related to the Four Blocks approach to language arts. In addition, Volcker’s principal observed her four times as part of the district’s evaluation system. After each observation, he sent her a sheet with several questions about her behaviors and the learning activities he observed. According to Volcker, “(t)he principal looks at everything from classroom management and instruction to classroom environment and relationships between the teacher and students.” At the same time, Volcker relied much less on her principal in defining her role at the school or maintaining her relationships with colleagues than did her special education counterparts, Potter and Williams.

Like Volcker, Maria Helton was matched with a school-based mentor, the reading specialist at Murray Elementary, in her first year of teaching, 2005-06. During that year, they had regular meetings times and they attended district trainings for mentors and mentees after school. In addition to their meetings, Helton’s mentor taught reading and writing lessons once a week in her classroom in 2005-06 and 2006-07. In 2006-07, she continued to talk with her mentor a few days a week whenever she had questions or needed materials. According to Helton, “I talk to her about everything” (language arts, math, students) “because she has been around for awhile. Along with her mentor, Helton talked frequently with the other 5th-grade teachers at her school about curricular issues and students as well as the 4th-grade teachers. With regard to her principal, Helton was observed four times in each of her first two years and during post-observation conferences, they would discuss students, curriculum, and classroom management strategies. While Volcker reported that her principal served as a strong instructional leader and a source of motivation for her, she did not feel dependent on her in terms of defining her role at the school or establishing or maintaining relationships with other teachers there.

In sum, the two beginning special educators, Potter and Williams, did not have access to school-based mentors who were knowledgeable about their curricula. Further, they faced severe challenges in setting up their work schedules and establishing relationships with general education colleagues at their schools. In both cases, their principals played key roles in helping them to define their roles and ensuring that general education teachers accepted them and their views of their roles. Both individuals also benefited significantly from support from social workers at their schools who helped them with IEPs, students, and other issues. In contrast, the two general education teachers, Volcker and Williams, had less need than the special educators to define their roles in relation to others at their schools. Further, while Volcker and Williams both had access to school-based mentors who were knowledgeable about their curricula as well as supportive general education colleagues and principals, they were less dependent on these individuals. As discussed in the next section, some of these differences in the induction experiences of special and general educators obtained at the middle school level as well.

How Middle School Teachers Negotiated Relationships With Mentors, Colleagues, and Principals

At the middle school level, the beginning special and general education teachers all had access to school-based mentors who were teaching or had previously taught a curriculum that was similar to their own. Like the elementary special educators, the novice middle school special educators strongly depended on their general education colleagues for help in defining their roles and meeting their responsibilities. Further, they were expected to develop productive relationships with a much greater number of colleagues than their general education counterparts. Finally, principals were a key instructional resource and source of support for both groups of middle school teachers, but the new middle school special and general educators seemed less dependent on their principals for help in defining their roles as compared to the new elementary special educators.

As a first-year 7th-grade resource room teacher in 2006-07, Barry Higginson had regular access to his mentor teacher who was teaching 7th-grade science, but who had previously taught special education. His mentor stopped in “every morning to touch base. How are things? What’s going on? I support a few students in her class so she’s really understanding about their needs and all that, the kind of work they’re going to need to do.” In addition to his mentor, he talked with the 6th-grade resource room teacher whose
The room was across the hall from him; they discussed IEPs as well as procedures for diagnosing students and assigning them to placements. Along with these two colleagues at Cherry Middle School, Higginson met frequently with the three general education teachers whose classes he supported. While they were all receptive to his ideas, he found it challenging to plan instruction with them while also meeting his own responsibilities as a resource room teacher. In particular, he found that a lot of his work in 2006-07 involved doing things for them and their classes. With regard to his principal, Higginson appreciated having the autonomy to do his work the way he saw fit. In his words, “Our principal has been fantastic in the way he doesn’t micromanage things . . . The change in leadership and attitude has really helped. It just makes it a better place to work.”

The other middle school special educator in the study, Kent Fuller, was a second-year 8th-grade teacher at Vista Middle School in 2006-07. In 2005-06, he was assigned to a mentor who worked as the 7th-grade resource room teacher at Vista. During that year, they spoke often about IEPs, students, and related issues, but their conversations focused more on procedures than instructional issues. In 2006-07, Fuller talked with her less frequently than the previous year, mostly about students who had been on her caseload in 2005-06. Like Higginson, though, a lot of Fuller’s time was devoted to meeting with the general education teachers with whom he co-taught math and history. In his view, “it took a year or so to get in with the teachers. I was uncomfortable at first, they were open and would help out.” Higginson’s principal observed him at least four times in both 2005-06 and 2006-07 and provided him with honest, direct feedback. According to Higginson, “If there’s something I’m doing wrong, don’t save my feelings, just tell me what I’m doing. (We had) some really in-depth conversations on what I did really well and what I could do differently.”

The two middle school general education teachers both had access to mentors who taught in the same subject areas and who were knowledgeable about their curricula. At the same time, they were less dependent on their general education colleagues than their special education counterparts, and they were not expected to teach with as many colleagues. Finally, like the elementary general educators and the middle school special educators, the two middle school general educators were less dependent on their principals for help in defining their roles and meeting their responsibilities. As a first-year 6th-grade math teacher in 2006-07, Paul Grantham was matched with a mentor who taught 7th-grade math. He talked with her informally every day, often about curricular issues and classroom management, and he observed her teach. In addition, Grantham regularly talked with the math department chair at his school, a 6th-grade teacher, and the special education teachers who worked with his students. In his words, “my planning period runs through all three of our lunches so there is always a time when I know there is a teacher who doesn’t have to teach and I can go talk to them.” With regard to his principal, he observed Grantham four times in 2006-07.

For her part, Christie Denham was in her first year of teaching 6th-grade science in 2006-07. Her mentor was the other 6th-grade science teacher at Vista Middle School. Although they taught in adjacent classrooms, they did not meet regularly; instead, their conversations occurred in passing and lacked depth. Denham spoke often with an 8th-grade science teacher at Vista about science-specific teaching issues and she talked with other 6th-grade teachers with questions about policies and procedures. In terms of her principal, she felt strongly supported, which “makes me want to work harder . . . any question that I may have, I know I can go to him and feel confident that he’ll help me or point me in the right direction.” Denham appreciated the fact that her mentor gave her a lot of autonomy, but she expressed a desire for more content-specific instructional assistance from her mentor or the other science teachers at her school.

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that the curricular and role expectations placed on beginning special education teachers differed substantially from those placed on novice general education teachers, that new special educators were much more dependent on their general education colleagues in defining their roles and carrying out their responsibilities, and that they were expected to develop relationships with a greater number and wider range of individuals. In addition, beginning elementary special
educators seemed particularly dependent on their principals for help in defining their roles and establishing productive relationships with general education teachers. But what accounts for the variations in the expectations experienced by these groups of teachers? And what aspects of principal leadership and school organization seemed to contribute to positive induction experiences for these novices? In this section, we first examine how federal policies have significantly increased the role expectations for special education teachers. Then we consider how school leadership and social networks can help new special education teachers address the expectations placed on them and negotiate productive relationships with their colleagues.

In public schools in the U.S., the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA, 2004) emphasizes that children with disabilities should participate in general education settings as much as possible. Thus, special educators have a legal obligation to devise IEPs for students with special needs and establish productive relationships with general education colleagues in order to maximize the amount of time that such students are in general education classrooms. In this sense, their roles and responsibilities can be seen as significantly different from those of general educators. But for new special educators, these challenges can be compounded in a variety of ways. In many schools, especially at the elementary level, beginning special educators do not have school-based colleagues with similar training or responsibilities. As seen in the cases of Kelly Potter and Ann Williams, even when they are assigned to formal mentors, these mentors often do not work at their schools or are unfamiliar with their curricula and roles. Further, general education elementary teachers are generally accustomed to teaching in their own classrooms with the same group of students throughout the day. The notion that special education teachers will co-teach in their (i.e., general education) rooms and work with small groups of their students in and outside their rooms can be threatening and provoke resistance, as seen in the case of Potter.

Along with IDEA, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) mandates that students with special needs be included in the administration of state reading, writing, and mathematics tests. Thus, schools and districts have clear incentives to maximize the amount of instruction such students receive in these core content areas. But, as seen in Potter’s case, it can be difficult for a beginning special educator to convince general educators to co-teach inclusive classes or to set high academic expectations for students with disabilities, especially if these colleagues are older, have more teaching experience, and/or have been at the school for longer periods of time. When principals and district officials do not make inclusion a top priority, they not only leave novice special education teachers vulnerable to the whims of experienced general education teachers who don’t support inclusion; they also fail to ensure that their schools are in compliance with IDEA and NCLB.

In considering how principals, mentors, and colleagues can support new special education teachers, the findings from this study indicate that it is important to consider both a) the individual special education teacher’s curricular and instruction practices (i.e., her direct work with students) and b) the extent to which novice special educators are integrated into their school faculties (i.e., the structure of their social networks). Principals can play a key role with regard to a) in a number of ways. First, they can provide clear guidance with regard to curricular expectations. Second, as seen in the cases of Paul Grantham and Christie Denham, they can ensure that new special education teachers have access to mentors or colleagues who are knowledgeable about their curriculum and the types of disabilities with which they are working (Coburn, 2001). Further, school leaders can support novices by identifying appropriate professional development activities and arranging for them to participate in such activities (Author, 2002).

But principals can also play a critical role by communicating their beliefs about inclusion to all school staff, taking steps to ensure that special educators are integrated into core content instruction, and reducing the degree of isolation that many experience. When school leaders help new special educators establish and maintain social networks in their schools (involving both general educators and other special educators), they increase the likelihood that both groups will have common learning goals for students, that they will collaborate on planning instruction and analyzing student learning, and that faculty will share responsibility for students’ academic progress and behavior (Lee & Loeb, 2000; Newmann et al., 1996). Grantham and Denham, for example, shared common instructional objectives with their general
education colleagues and experienced strong collaborative cultures at their schools. In contrast, when novice special educators have weaker or more limited social networks, the extent to which they are influenced by same-field mentors or clear curricular guidelines may be lessened because they may feel less integrated into their schools and less supported by their colleagues.

Conclusion, Implications

In view of the high rates of attrition and migration (to general education) among beginning special education teachers (Boe, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004), it seems necessary for school administrators and district policy makers to consider new ways of organizing induction for such novices. By analyzing the expectations placed on new special and general education teachers and the varying ways in which they negotiated professional relationships, this article suggests new ways to conceptualize and structure induction support in special education. We argue that beginning special educators exert tremendous amounts of effort in creating and modifying curriculum, addressing ambiguity in their assignments, and building relationships with colleagues. Access to same-field mentors and clear curricular guidelines can help them determine their curriculum and carry out their instructional duties to some extent. But in order to further reduce role ambiguity for new special educators, ensure that they meet their legal obligations (enshrined in IDEA and NCLB), and integrate them into their schools, principals and district administrators may need to take strong, visible positions in support of inclusion and help them establish social networks in their schools.

Other studies have documented the role ambiguity, professional isolation, excessive paperwork demands and high levels of stress experienced by beginning special educators (Billingsley, 2004; Gersten et al., 2001; Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Zabel & Zabel, 2001). This study builds on earlier work to describe the curricular, instructional, and role expectations that such teachers confront, to contrast these expectations with those experienced by new general educators, and to consider how both groups make sense of and respond to the expectations placed on them. As compared to their general education counterparts, we found that the four novice special educators in the study allocated much more time and effort to devising and modifying curricula, co-teaching classes, and forging relationships with general education colleagues. Further, this account indicates that due to the nature of the expectations they faced, early career special educators were much more dependent on their general education colleagues and they were expected to develop relationships with a greater number and wider range of individuals.

For some of the novices in special and general education in this study, having access to mentors or experienced colleagues with knowledge of their curriculum helped them to reduce role ambiguity and to meet their instructional responsibilities. But the new elementary special education teachers in the study, Kelly Potter and Ann Williams, did not have access to same-field mentors or colleagues in their schools; this was a function of school size and the nature of the disabilities at their schools. For these teachers, we found that their principals were critical in helping them establish their roles, develop productive relationships with colleagues, and carry out their responsibilities. While researchers have documented the key roles that principals play in induction and professional development for general education teachers (Author, 2007; Carver, 2003; Coburn, 2001; Goldstein, 2004), there has been less attention to how school leadership affects novice special educators’ experiences. The findings from this study suggest that principals can strongly support such novices by communicating with all school staff about the importance of inclusion and ensuring that special educators are well integrated into their faculties.

Finally, based on the results presented here, we argue that induction programs for beginning special education teachers should address the nature of their school-based social networks. When general and special education faculty have common learning goals, when they collaborate on instruction, and when responsibility for student learning is shared, it seems likely that novice special educators will face clearer curricular and role expectations and will be able to establish productive relationships with their general education colleagues. This notion builds on research that has documented the importance of social networks for efforts to implement curricular or technology reforms (Coburn & Russell, 2008;
Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004). Social networks also seem relevant for efforts to integrate special educators into their schools and effectively address the requirements of IDEA and NCLB.

In terms of limitations, this study focused on a relatively small number of special education and general education teachers in one school district in Michigan. In future research on the induction experiences of special education teachers, it will be important to include larger numbers of teachers in multiple districts as well as multiple states. Further, the findings reported here suggest the importance of principals and social networks for new special educator induction, but we were not able to discern significant quantitative relationships between these factors and the new teachers’ induction experiences. Therefore, a goal for future research could be to use larger data sets to examine connections between a) principal leadership, b) teachers’ social networks, and c) the induction experiences of and key outcomes for beginning special education teachers.
Appendix

Table 1 – Study Participants (2006-07)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Year of Teaching</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Potter</td>
<td>Special Education, Grades 2-5</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>DeGrosta Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Williams</td>
<td>Special Education, Grades 1-5</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Bentley Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Higginson</td>
<td>Special Education, Grade 7</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Cherry Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent Fuller</td>
<td>Special Education, Grade 8</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Vista Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Helton</td>
<td>General Education, Grade 5</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>Edwards Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elise Volcker</td>
<td>General Education, Grade 3</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Barnaby Elementary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Grantham</td>
<td>General Education, Grade 6 Mathematics</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Cherry Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie Denham</td>
<td>General Education, Grade 6 Science</td>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>Vista Middle School</td>
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Table 2 – Initial and Final Codes

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<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Final Codes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Background, Student Teaching</td>
<td>Background, Teaching Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beliefs About Teaching</td>
<td>Curricular and Instructional Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>Role Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment to Teaching</td>
<td>Content/Frequency of Interactions with Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Content/Frequency of Interactions with Special Education Colleagues</td>
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<td>Dist. Curriculum/ Special Education Coordinators</td>
<td>Content/Frequency of Interactions with General Education Colleagues</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Education Colleagues</td>
<td>Content/Frequency of Interactions with Principal</td>
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<td>Induction, Professional Development</td>
<td>Content/Frequency of Participation in Induction and Professional Development</td>
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<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Teacher Evaluation</td>
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<td>Mentor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization of School for Special Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role, Learning About Role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education Colleagues</td>
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<td>Student Assessment</td>
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<td>Students with Special Needs</td>
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<td>Teacher Evaluation</td>
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<td>Teacher Assignment</td>
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2006-07 Early Career Special Education Teacher Interview Questions

Initial Questions

1. Could you describe your background, your current responsibilities, and how long you have been teaching at this school?

2. Could you describe how your school organizes special education?

3. For which students (grade level and disability category) are you responsible?

4. Could you describe the curriculum you are responsible for teaching?

5. How have you learned about the curriculum (i.e., the main topics and themes) that you are expected to teach?

6. Could you describe any other job responsibilities that you have specific to special education?

7. How have you learned about the school’s expectations for how you should complete these responsibilities?

8. Do you have a formally designated mentor?

9. How often do you meet or talk with your mentor about work-related issues?

10. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with your mentor?

11. How often do you meet or talk with special education colleagues?

12. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with your colleague(s)?

13. How often do you meet or talk with one of your grade-level colleagues?

14. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with these colleagues?

15. Name 3 individuals at the school who have provided you with the most useful assistance related to your work.

Follow Up Questions

16. As a first-year teacher, do you receive any other forms of support from your district?

17. Do school administrators and staff have a consistent, effective approach to discipline and managing student behavior?

18. Do people at your school take your ideas seriously? How comfortable do you feel sharing your opinions?

19. To what degree do you feel committed to teaching special education next year? In five years?

20. To what degree do you feel committed to teaching in your school next year? In five years?
2006-07 Early Career General Education Teacher Interview Questions

Initial Questions

1. Could you describe your background in education and prior professional experience?
2. Could you describe your current responsibilities and how long you have been teaching at this school?
3. Could you describe the language arts curriculum at your school and in your district?
4. How have you learned about the language arts curriculum for your grade(s) at this school?
5. Could you describe the mathematics curriculum at your school and in your district?
6. How have you learned about the mathematics curriculum for your grade(s) at this school?
7. How often do you meet or talk with one or more colleagues?
8. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with one or more colleagues?
9. Do you have a formally designated mentor?
10. How often do you meet or talk with your mentor about work-related issues?
11. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with your mentor?

Follow Up Questions

12. Could you describe the teacher evaluation process at this school?
13. How often do you meet or talk with your principal?
14. What do you discuss when you meet or talk with your principal?
15. Do school administrators and staff have a consistent, effective approach to discipline and managing student behavior?
16. Do people at your school take your ideas seriously? How comfortable did you feel sharing your opinion?
17. Do you know the union representatives in your school or district?
References


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i Teacher migration refers to movement by a teacher from one’s school of origin to another school.

ii There seem to be two main reasons for the fact that few research studies have examined beginning special education teachers and beginning general education teachers as part of the same research design: a) the professional work lives of these two groups of teachers have traditionally been viewed as separate; and b) researchers who study (have studied) special education teachers generally do not also study (have not studied) general education teachers, and vice versa. With special education students and teachers being increasingly integrated into general education classrooms (i.e., core content instruction), there is a growing need for research studies that investigate both groups of teachers simultaneously.

iii The 10 districts in the larger study ranged in size from 8,242 students in grade K-12 to 27,066 students, the percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch ranged from 29 percent to 64 percent, and the percentages of racial minority students ranged from 19 percent to 83 percent.

iv Pseudonyms are used for the district, schools, and teachers named in this paper.

v We sought special education teachers who were responsible for academic instruction and general education teachers who were teaching in core content areas because we were interested in understanding possible connections between resources (e.g., mentors, colleagues, professional development) and new teachers’ experiences determining, negotiating, and meeting the curricular, instructional, and role expectations placed on them. We sought teachers who were teaching full-time because we believed that their needs and instructional growth would be different from part-time teachers and that they were more likely to develop close working relationships with mentors, colleagues, and/or principals. We sought teachers who had earned standard certificates because we felt that their needs and instructional growth would be different from teachers who had entered the profession through alternative or emergency routes.

vi There is no reason to believe that those new teachers in Kaline who volunteered to participate in the interview study had significantly different induction experiences compared to those who did not volunteer...
their participation. Indeed, there are several reasons why the induction experiences of the two groups (i.e., those who volunteered to participate and those who did not) were similar. For one, first-year teachers in both districts were invited to participate in the study in September 2006, at a time when they were just beginning to develop relationships with mentors and other colleagues; this decreases the likelihood that only novices receiving strong support would have selected to participate and vice-versa. Second, the experiences of special education and general education teachers in Kaline were strikingly similar within -- but not across -- these two groups.